Qualifying Exam & Dissertation

Qualifying Examination

In the PhD program, doctoral students must take and pass a combined written and oral Qualifying Examination. The Qualifying Examination provides evidence the student is able to:

- Critically read, understand, and evaluate current literature in the discipline
- Integrate and synthesize ideas within the field
- Demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of the literature in the field
- Critically evaluate empirical evidence
- Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of techniques critical to scholarship in the field
- Communicate clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences

After completing all required coursework in the first two years, including at least five quarters, a student may apply to the UCSF Graduate Division to take the qualifying examination with the written approval of the Chair of his or her Graduate Committee. The examination is offered
at the convenience of the student and his or her Graduate Committee and consists of a detailed six-page National Institutes of Health (NIH) style grant proposal to answer a rehabilitation science research question in a field related to his/her primary research area.

The oral portion of the qualifying examination lasts up to three hours and is closed to the general public, with the exception of the primary research mentor, who is only an observer. The student make a 10-15 minute presentation on his/her research plan with a dry erase board made available for a ?chalk talk?. Questions for the oral examination will typically be based on the presentation, but can include materials covered from any required class in the curriculum, as well as anything pertaining to the student?s area of specialization. The purpose of the oral examination is to determine the student?s mastery of content within the rehabilitation science program. Upon finishing their course of study and taking the examination, students should be able to apply reasoning related to rehabilitation science to their chosen substantive areas and resolve methodological problems. The examination will cover the breadth and depth of a student?s knowledge in his/her area of specialization within the field of rehabilitation science.

In accordance with the UCSF Graduate Division guidelines, at least one meeting of the whole committee must be held to discuss the results of the examination. The committee may grade the examination either ?Pass? (or ?Contingent Pass?, pending response to committee concerns on the proposal) or ?Fail?.

The minimum time between examinations is three months. Students who fail the oral examination a second time will be dismissed from the PhD program.

Dissertation

Each doctoral student conducts research under the supervision of a primary research mentor and a Dissertation Committee. This Committee will be composed of three faculty knowledgeable in the field related to the student?s research and is responsible for overseeing the research conducted by the student.

The goal for the dissertation is to provide the student independent-investigator involvement, including idea conception, study design, methodological structure, acquisition, processing, and interpretation, with mentoring and oversight from the Dissertation Committee. The student?s dissertation will include two or three separate projects addressing a single focused dissertation objective with sufficient depth and breadth to contribute to the body of literature in the field.

It is expected that the graduate?s research will be appropriate for dissemination as part of his or her next steps in establishing an independent scholarly agenda in a faculty position. All PhD students are expected to present their work at national meetings, as it is a critical element in developing one?s career skills and building a professional network.

Dissertation Defense

A closed defense of the dissertation will be required for all students. Each student will have 45 minutes to orally present his/her dissertation written project. This presentation and subsequent questioning will represent the acceptance or refusal by the Committee of the student?s body of work throughout the dissertation process. After the formal presentation by
the student, the Committee will be allowed to ask questions, propose changes to the written dissertation, and/or request additional investigations, which must be within the scope of the approved research proposal.

**Final Presentation**
After the Dissertation Committee has approved the completed dissertation, a final presentation will be required for all students, prior to graduation. The presentation will be open to the local scientific community, general public, and family and friends. Announcements will be made to the appropriate UCSF, SFSU, and outside communities regarding the dissertation presentation. After the completion of the presentation, the student will be required to field questions from the general audience.